

My name is John Rickards of Mansfield, Connecticut and I oppose S.B. No. 840 regarding the elimination of the Office of Healthcare Advocate (OHA).

My personal experience with OHA, in particular with Ms. Darlene West, has been extremely positive. During a time when our family was profoundly shaken, she demonstrated professional competence, understanding and even compassion. She tirelessly worked on all aspects of our case for well over one year in the course of which she saved us tens of thousands of dollars.

Our story concerns our daughter, Claire, who is a graduate student at the University of Connecticut-Storrs. Claire had an internship in the Stamford area in the summer of 2007. As her previously undiagnosed medical condition seemed to deteriorate more and more over the summer, she decided to seek the opinion of a gynecologist in a different area of the State. Upon seeing the results of the previous blood tests, Dr DeCholnoky astutely decided to order an MRI of Claire's brain. The test revealed a large tumor (c. 2.5 cm) above the pituitary gland that was severely stretching the optic nerve and pressing it against the bony base of the brain. The tumor also extended into the entrance of the left cavernous sinus which is the location of one of a carotid artery.

In a meeting with Dr. DeCholnoky on August 21, 2007, she indicated to us that the tumor would have to be removed and that the surgery should not be done in Connecticut due to the tumor's size, location and the intricacy of the procedure needed under these circumstances. She explicitly recommended New York Presbyterian or Mass General as major neurosurgery hospitals where a large number of such surgeries are performed on a regular basis. She then set up a meeting for us the next day with Dr. Pantaleo, an endocrinologist in Stamford.

Dr. Pantaleo confirmed the opinion of Dr. DeCholnoky regarding the need to go out-of-network for the surgery. (In fact, Dr. Pantaleo subsequently wrote a letter to Anthem requesting that Claire be allowed to go out-of-network for the surgery pointing out that serious long-term consequences could easily ensue if the surgery were not performed in expert fashion). He also told us that the tumor should be removed within three weeks. He then called Neuroendocrinology Center at Mass General to try to set up an appointment for Claire as soon as possible. Having reviewed Claire's MRI report, we received an urgent call later that day from the Neuroendocrinology Center that we should come the following day (August 23) to see Dr. Utz.

At our meeting, Dr. Utz indicated that because of the size of the tumor and its intricate involvement with the optic nerve, Claire's surgery should be performed by the most experienced neurosurgeon at Mass General in the removal of pituitary tumors, Dr. Brooke Swearingen. He performed the surgery on September 11.

As we were preparing to take Claire to Mass General on September 10, we received word from Dr. Swearingen's assistant that Anthem had rejected Dr. Pantaleo's referral request for out-of-network service. Dr. Swearingen's office needed to know if we still wanted to go through with the surgery the next day. Obviously, we did not hesitate in following through with the surgery.

After a few failed attempts to get any satisfaction regarding our claims from Anthem, I contacted OHA. And, as I indicated above, we have been extremely pleased with the assistance they have provided us. Having recently read Karen Tumulty's cover story in *Time* magazine, we came to appreciate even more just how important OHA is in helping the citizens of our State work their way through the "American health care maze," as Tumulty describes it.